DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 354 EA 016 312

AUTHOR Bird, John A.
TITLE A Creative Approach to Planning That Works.
PUB DATE Mar 83
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Independent Schools (Anaheim, CA, March 17-19, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Assessment; Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation; Futures (of Society); *Long Range Planning; Prediction; *Private Schools; *Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS National Association of Independent Schools

ABSTRACT

The social and economic turbulence encountered from 1966 to 1977 was the major factor in the National Association of Independent School's (NAIS) developing a new long range planning process in 1977. The process is based upon the premise that an independent school must constantly evaluate itself against internal and external criteria. It does not have as a primary concern financial or facilities planning. The planning process assumes that preparation for the future involves conforming or reformulating mission and role in relation to an ability to assess changes. Assessment is central to the process and is qualitative, not quantitative. The planning process is carried out by a carefully selected group which begins by considering the widest range of trends in a brainstorming session. This group then divides into task forces that identify common future directions. From these common future directions, goals and implementation strategies are derived. This planning process is simple, flexible, and easily learned, and is made available by NAIS through workshops. (MD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED239354

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John A. Bird
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO PLANNING THAT WORKS

John A. Bird

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Independent Schools, Anaheim, California, March 17-19, 1983.

EA 016 312

A Creative Approach to Planning that Works

Once upon a time in 1966 there thrived in a small midwestern city an independent secondary school (grades 7-12) with 350 boarding and day students. Enrollment was stable, salaries were slightly above the NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) mean, tuitions were slightly below the NAIS median, and the budget was balanceed thanks to healthy annual giving. To plan for the school's future prosperity, administrative and trustee leaders attended a long range financial planning seminar sponsored by NAIS. Ten years later in 1976, with enrollment declining, with faculty salaries falling further and further behind other independent and area public schools, and with the operating budget deficit swelling, the school was on the brink of closing.

What had happened? A combination of changing demographics and social attitudes caused enrollment demand to shrink and alumni support to deteriorate. Industry had left the community. Affluent families had fled to more suburban locales as minority population increased. Adolescents with more say in where they went to school were rejecting the boarding option as too confining. Inflation was rampant. But the school had been unprepared to anticipate any of these contingencies.

Why? Hadn't they gone to a long range planning seminar in 1966? Why didn't that prepare them? The simple reason was that the emphasis of that seminar had been on numbers, particularly money. The school had been encouraged to make a financial forecast for the next 10 years on the assumption that the present would continue to repeat itself. The financial forecast was the heart of the process. What the school could afford dictated the program goals that were developed. Furthermore, the school had been only casually advised to involve the entire faculty, staff, and other

EA 016 312

that can profoundly influence a school's development. In fact, the planning exercise was used to promote existing priorities - a new gym and an endowment fund to keep tuitions low - noble aims soon to be engulfed by the more pressing priority of survival.

If that school had used a different planning process, would it have survived the decade from 1966 to 1976 in better shape? No one can know for sure, but a planning process that had focused the attention of a representative cross-section of the school's constitutencies on the broadest possible horizon might have left the school better prepared to cope with one of the most turbulent periods in our country's social and economic history.

With the experience of the aforementioned and other schools in mind, in 1977 the NAIS's Commission on Educational Issues developed a new planning process. Since then the process has been refined in practice and successfully employed by many independent schools, other non-profit agencies, and corporations.

NAIS's commitment to this new planning process led to the appointment of Susan C. Stone, former Chairman of the Board of Holland Hall School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as External Director for Long Range Planning Services. Mrs. Stone teaches the planning process to groups of schools and consults with individual schools.

The planning process now advocated by NAIS is based on the premise that an independent school, or any organization for that matter, must, if it is to prosper, constantly evaluate itself against internal and external criteria and not be afraid to ask itself hard questions. An institution which fails to do

this will languish.

The NAIS process does not have as a primary concern either financial planning or the planning of the school's physical facilities. Rather, the basic assumption of the process is that education is always in transition and always profoundly influenced by shifts in the demographic patterns of our population, by the move toward life-long learning, by changes in public attitudes about education, and by a variety of other trends - and that the most effective way for a school to prepare for the future is to confirm or reformulate its educational mission and role in light of its value assessment of those changes.

Central to the NAIS planning process are qualitative, not quantitative, assessments. A numbers crunching emphasis, such as that employed by the school described earlier, is discouraged in favor of examining changing values. The quantitative analyses come much later in the process..

Survival in today's rapidly changing world requires being organized to take the long view. Thus, the NAIS approach forces schools to jump ahead at least ten years to avoid being inhibited by today's concerns (or "the leaky roof" syndrome as I refer to it).

A school is in better position to respond to whatever external changes occur after it acquires experience in speculating about the future. That long view is accomplished by asking a carefully selected, representative group of 12 to 15 members, to begin the planning process, not with an appraisal of the school's goals as is frequently the process for longrange planning; instead,

the group is asked to consider the widest possible range of educational, marketing, technological, economic, political, and social trends. To stimulate creativity, the committee is first asked to view these changes externally - those that occur away from the school and local community. They employ the nonjudgmental, idea-generating technique of brainstorming. This same foremat is repeated to extract internal community issues in the same categories. Once this group has brainstormed issues which could affect the school, the committee then brainstorms possible school responses to these issues. Members are asked to see issues as offering challenges and/or opportunities for the school in the years ahead.

The committee is next divided into four task forces of three or four members each. Based upon the previous group brainstorming exercise, each individual is first asked to spend time by himself evaluating the challenges and possible responses by the school community. He or she is then asked to work up a personal vision of the school community 10-15 years into the future.

Following that exercise, each task force is required to meet and weld the substance of the individual reports into a common vision for the future. Each task force then presents its summaries to the reassembled full planning committee. This can occur either in a concurrent session or at a later date. Some groups find it useful to accomplish the whole planning process during a two or three day retreat; others stretch the process out over several weeks. Both approaches appear to be effective. Whatever the approach, common future directions are identified after lengthy discussion. Common directions are formulated into policy goals, rationale statements and implementation strategies. These form the heart of a final report presented to the Board

of Trustees for approval. The policy goals are broad-brush in nature and provide a framework for future planning, leaving detailed study and implementation to other groups. For example, a school might have as a policy goal, "To provide non-academic programs that strengthen the school community by responding to changing life styles." In the rationale the school might refer to a need to accommodate changing family work patterns by instituting a child-care program to serve the before and after school needs of enrolled students. The feasibility of establishing a day care center is not the policy goal but merely an example of how the policy goal might be implemented.

If a policy goal is accepted by the board, a separate committee proceeds to evaluate the suggested strategies and to brainstorm and evaluate additional ones. That committee may decide that the child care program is an unfeasible strategy for implementing the policy goal.

As summarized in the Manual on Long Range Planning and Policy Development for Independent Schools published by NAIS, "The advantages to this approach to long range planning are many. It need not drain time, energy, or financial resources of the school. It is simple and easily learned, a disciplined approach that avoids unreliable, specific financial forecasts, but does focus on background data critical to financial health. The process involves members of the board, faculty, administration, and parent body as members of a planning team. It challenges their creativity and imagination. It is flexible enough that a calendar can be tailored to the needs of an individual school. That can translate into a couple of weekend 'blitzes' or several two or three hour meetings for half a school year or more. In short, it works."

There was the bank committed to adding to the existing, overcrowded facility until a long range planning expedition revealed that abandoning the present building might be a better move because of changing demographics and impending upheavals in the banking industry.

There was the school bogged down with another planning process designed to study all aspects of the school's operations by mears of surveys and reviews by a host of separate sub-planning committees. Starting from scratch with a committee of twelve, the school "cut through the gordian knot" in two weekends using the NAIS process.

As John Esty, President of NAIS, says in the foreword to the manual, "The survival of independent schools depends on sound planning." For further information on the NAIS long range planning policy contact the NAIS office. NAIS offers two-day workshops to train school leaders who wish to implement the process themselves. Susan Stone, Director of External Planning for NAIS, and others familiar with the process, are also available for consulting with individual schools.

About the author: John Bird is in his tenth year as Head of the Holland Hall School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His experience with longrange planning includes learning the original process developed by the Commission on Educational Issues of NAIS in 1977. Since then he has assisted in refining and revising that process and in marketing it to independent schools.